

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that he has helped secure a \$1.36 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development agency for the Village of Woodridge to replace its wastewater treatment plant and to make other sewer system upgrades. Hinchey has now helped to secure more than \$4.3 million in federal funding for the project, which is scheduled for construction in September or October. The village received preferential consideration for its application because of its location in the Sullivan-Wawarsing Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone, a special USDA designation for the area that Hinchey established in 1999.

"These funds are absolutely critical for the Village of Woodridge as it works to replace its failing wastewater treatment facility with a new one that will work properly," Hinchey said. "Sullivan County's designation as a REAP Zone has once again paid off in the form of the Village of Woodridge receiving this additional federal funding as the result of special consideration from USDA Rural Development under the federal designation. These funds will help relieve the financial burden on local residents as the village moves forward with constructing this new wastewater treatment plant."

Hinchey has worked with Woodridge and USDA Rural Development officials over the past several years to help secure a total of \$2.36 million in USDA funding for the project. The congressman also helped secure a \$2 million commitment from the U.S. EPA for the project. The Village of Woodridge's wastewater treatment facility, which was constructed in 1983, has increasingly failed and was deemed to be beyond repair. As a result, the village was required to construct a new plant at a new location, at an estimated cost of \$11-12 million. The USDA money will help to reduce this cost to the ratepayers in the village. The new plant will be relocated to improve the treatment process and to ensure that it will not discharge pollutants into the Neversink River, which is an important trout stream.

The congressman developed the REAP Zone initiative as part of an effort to help spur economic development in struggling rural areas. REAP Zones are first cousins to the internationally recognized Empowerment Zones & Enterprise Communities and are pilot projects of the USDA.

In January 1999, Hinchey persuaded the USDA to establish this new program in his congressional district on a 10-year trial basis, which was approved by the Clinton administration. As a result, the REAP Zone in Sullivan County and Wawarsing and a second REAP Zone in Tioga County were established. The Sullivan-Wawarsing REAP Zone covers all of Sullivan County as well as the Town of Wawarsing, including the Village of Ellenville, in Ulster County and the Tioga County REAP Zone covers all of Tioga County. The REAP Zones in the State of New York are two of only five such areas in the entire nation.

Earlier this year, USDA Rural Development signed an agreement with both the Sullivan County-Wawarsing and the Tioga REAP that extends the REAP program for those areas until September 30, 2012. The authorization to extend the REAP program was made possible through legislation that Hinchey helped pass through Congress last year.